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Opening extract from

Captain Valiant: Revenge of the Black Phantom

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CHAPTER 1



'So, Captain Valiant,' the Black Phantom said, sucking in his stomach and putting his hands on his hips, 'you think you can stop me from destroying London? Well, England's greatest superhero has finally met his match!' He burst into laughter. The Black Phantom did that a lot. It was really annoying. When he laughed he squawked like a parrot. 'Soon the whole world will tremble at my name!'

The Black Phantom dashed up the steps to his laser cannon. He sat in the firing seat and aimed the grey barrel at Big Ben. His hands became a blur as he turned dials and pulled levers.



'Quick, Dynamic Boy,' Captain Valiant shouted, 'we have to stop him before he fires. Turn on the light defractor!'

Captain Valiant picked up a car and threw it at one of the Black Phantom's megadroids. The giant robot turned its huge, square head just in time to see the car coming, but it was too slow to get out of the way.



The car hit it straight between the eyes. There was a roar of purple and yellow flames, and the head shot up into the air like a rocket. Hot metal pinged and pelted the pavement as the megadroid fell to its knees, gears crunching and joints snapping.

It was a good job the streets were deserted. The police and army had kept back the crowds, but the sight of two giant robots and a super villain's secret weapon was enough to make sure there would be someone, somewhere, with a camera. I hoped they

stayed out of the way. We didn't have time to save the world and an over-excited tourist!

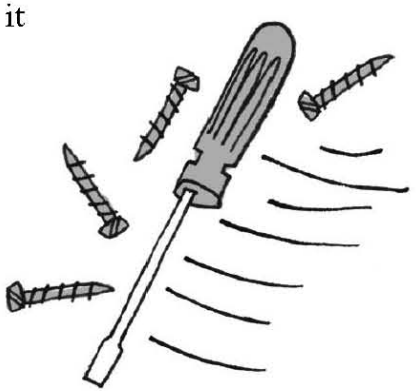
'Dynamic Boy, I told you to turn on the light defractor.' Captain Valiant flew down and landed in front of me, coughing and spluttering as smoke billowed around him.

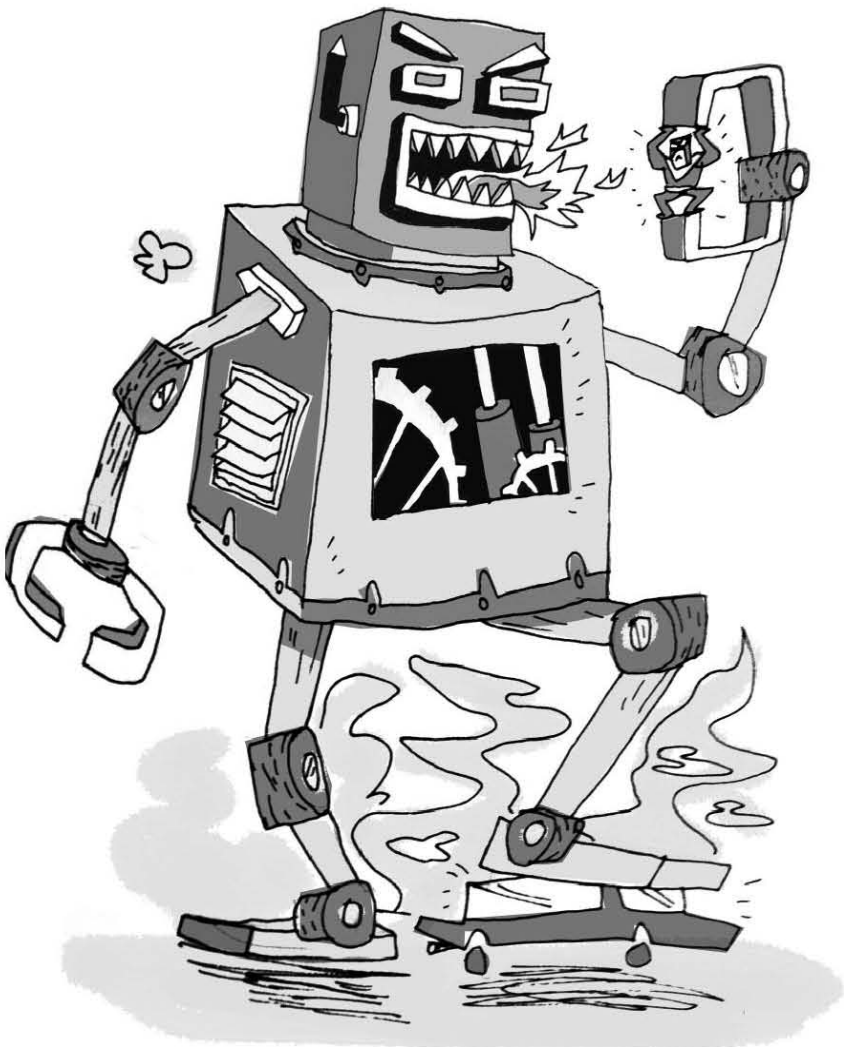
'Sorry, Dad,' I said. 'But I didn't bring it. I didn't think we'd need it.'

Captain Valiant shook his head. 'Wait until your mother hears about this.'

'I did bring my screwdriver set.'

I pulled the screwdriver set out of my utility belt, only it was upside down. The lid opened and the screwdrivers fell out. As I bent down to pick them up, an iron claw clamped around Captain Valiant. It was the second megadroid. It lifted Captain Valiant to its mouth





where rows of saws whirred between its jaws.

'Quick, Dynamic Boy,' Captain Valiant shouted, 'throw me a screwdriver!'

I grabbed the nearest two. 'Crosshead or flathead?' I asked.

'It doesn't really matter.'

I threw the biggest one. Captain Valiant caught the screwdriver and hurled it inside the megadroid's mouth. The giant robot stopped moving. The saws stopped whirring. There was a low rumble, like a burp. A stinking, yellow gas hissed out of the megadroid's backside and the robot fell on its face. Captain Valiant pulled himself free.

'Right, now for the laser cannon,' he said.

Big Ben started to chime. The Black Phantom's laugh echoed across the street.

'You're too late, Captain Valiant,' he cried. 'My Megadroids have delayed you long enough. Tonight, London dies!'

The laser cannon hummed. It rose from the ground on a metal platform which rattled and groaned. Its grey barrel sparked like a firework.

'I have no choice, Dynamic Boy,' Captain Valiant said. 'I'll have to absorb the blast!'

'But you know what happened the last time you did that,' I said. 'You had an upset stomach for a week.'

'It's a small price to pay to save the world.'

'Not when we only have one bathroom, it isn't.'

I ran across the street, leaping over the fallen



megadroids. The humming from the laser cannon grew louder. I dashed under the platform, jumping over cables and wires. The cannon whined. There was a



The Black Phantom shrieked with laughter. Then everything went quiet.

'Well done, Dynamic Boy,' Captain Valiant said, hovering over the laser cannon. 'What did you do – block the particle flow?'

'No,' I said. 'I took this out.' I held up an electric plug.

The Black Phantom saw the plug, shouted something *very* rude and continued to turn dials and pull levers. Captain Valiant soon stopped him. He flew to the cannon, dragged him out of his seat and brought him down to earth with a thud.

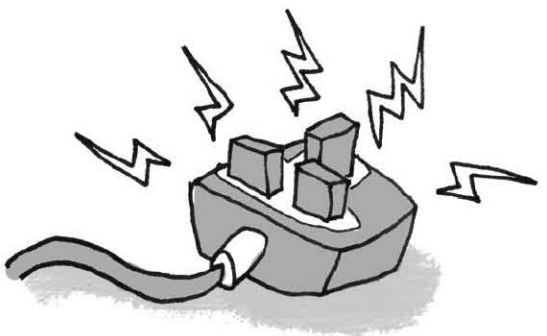
Now he was in front of us, the Black Phantom didn't seem that frightening. He was a short, round man with stubby arms and legs. To be honest, he looked like an overgrown garden gnome. His costume didn't even fit properly. It had wrinkles around the neck and ankles.

'Right, now that we've foiled your plan,' Captain Valiant said, pulling off the Black Phantom's mask, 'let's see who you really are.' A fat face with small eyes and a twisted mouth stared back at us. 'Well, well, Dr Simon Kirby. So this is what you were doing with the government's money. Rather than developing a form of renewable energy, you made a laser cannon.'

'And I would have got away with it as well, if it wasn't for you pesky superheroes,' Kirby sneered. 'For years I've worked in secret, following

orders, doing what I was told. But I should be the one giving orders. I'm the genius – ME, the Black Phantom, the greatest criminal mastermind of them all!'

Captain Valiant pointed at the plug. 'If you're such a genius, why did you use a plug?'



Kirby shrugged. 'You should have seen the size of the battery. It was as big as a house.'

I sighed and threw the plug down. I was tired. It had been a long night. I had better things to do than listen to another super villain going on about why he should take over the world.

'Look, Dad, if we're finished here, can we go home now? I have a maths test in the morning.'

Kirby laughed and raised a stubby finger. 'The only test you have coming, Dynamic Boy, is the test of doom!'

Captain Valiant and I looked at each other. We didn't know whether to laugh or take him seriously.

'What's that supposed to mean?' I asked.

Kirby laughed until his face wobbled and little, greasy tears dribbled down his cheeks. 'You'll find out soon enough,' he said. 'It's coming, Dynamic Boy, the test of doom!'